Stanley Greig Smith (MBE, JP, FCIS), known to his friends as Greig, was one of a small and dedicated group of Melbournians who founded the social work profession in this state. According to Associate Professor Ruth Hoban of the University of Melbourne, writing after his death, he was almost certainly the first Victorian to be made a Life Member of the AASW, which occurred when the AASW was formed in 1946. Although Smith was not a trained social worker, this was fitting acknowledgement for the man who in 1935 had convened the meeting that had established the Victorian Association of Social Workers, which preceded the AASW and later became the Victorian Branch of the AASW.

Smith, a Glaswegian journalist and civil servant, had migrated to Australia for health reasons in the early twentieth century. In 1909 he was appointed as Secretary (equivalent to a CEO today) to Melbourne’s Charity Organisation Society. At a time when there was no national government safety net for the poor and when there were extremes of poverty and deprivation, the Charity Organisation Society was the leading non-government organisation working directly with Victoria’s poor, and lobbying government for improvements. From 1926, after the formation of a COS newsletter, The Other Half, Smith campaigned in its pages for the development of training for social workers and kept Melbournians up to date with social work education and research developments in Britain and the USA. Under Smith’s leadership the COS also developed an excellent library, open to all, which subscribed to key social work journals such as the USA’s The Survey, Better Times, The Family and from England The Charity Organisation Quarterly among others, and also held an extensive collection of books and government reports. This collection is now housed at the University of Melbourne’s Baillieu Library. In this way, Smith helped educate Victorians about the value of trained social workers. When in 1929 the Melbourne Hospital (not yet Royal) employed an English Almoner, Agnes McIntyre, to develop a medical social work service and to commence training local university graduates as almoners, Smith readily supported Miss McIntyre and taught in the almoner course.

Under Smith’s leadership the Charity Organisation Society was one of the six sponsors of a meeting at Melbourne Town Hall in 1931 where it was unanimously decided that general social work training was needed in Victoria, and that this was an even higher priority than the newly commenced almoner training. It was this meeting that eventually led to the establishment of the first social work educational course in Melbourne, which in 1940 became the University of Melbourne’s social work course. It took some time to recruit a social worker to run Melbourne’s new social work course, and it was Helen Rees (then in charge of the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners) and Stanley Greig Smith who developed and ran the earliest generic social work training. This continued until the arrival in 1934 of the first head of social work education in Melbourne, Jocelyn Hyslop. From 1933 to 1959 Smith served on the Board of Social Studies that oversaw the Melbourne course. Hyslop later became the first president of the Victorian Association of Social Workers.
Although he had not been trained as a social worker, Smith’s extensive reading, combined with his daily contact with the issues facing Melbourne’s poor, had convinced him of the importance of the young profession and given him great expertise in the area. After his death, Ruth Hoban, Head of the Social Work Department at the University of Melbourne, wrote of Smith as a man who had won respect

… for his wise counsel, unfailing good humour, and acute and far-sighted vision for the future of social welfare in Australia. He strove constantly for a better integration between voluntary welfare services in Victoria, and their closer co-operation with statutory effort; for a better standard of performance in individual societies, including his own; for a more effective and protective framework of social welfare legislation in Victoria, especially for children…¹

Jane Miller October 2016
References:
Ruth Hoban, Stanley Greig Smith, MBE, JP, FCIS, Unit 16, 6 Hoban Archives, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

¹ Ruth Hoban, "Stanley Greig Smith, MBE, JP, FCIS" Unit 16, 6 Hoban Archives, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne